



- 3.0 Those who Set the Stage
- 3.2 Republicans and those who would resort to physical force
- 3.2.4 **Eoin MacNeill and the Irish Volunteers**

MacNeill contributed directly to the Rising by establishing, arming and training the Irish Volunteers.

Eoin MacNeill (1867-1945) was born of middle-class Catholic parents at Glenarm on the Antrim coast. He was educated at St Malachy's College, Belfast and gained a degree from the Royal University of Ireland. In 1893, together with Douglas Hyde and others he founded the Gaelic League, an organisation devoted to the preservation of the Irish language, literature, and traditional culture. He was the first secretary of the Gaelic League, and edited its influential journal An Claidheamh Soluis (the Sword of Light) for a period. A brilliant linguist and historian, MacNeill revolutionised Celtic studies, establishing that the sources did not extend beyond the fifth century and that accounts of earlier periods were based on late fabrications. In 1909, he became professor of early and medieval Irish history at University College, Dublin.

While primarily a scholar and cultural activist, in an article entitled 'The North began' in An Claidheamh Soluis (1 November 1913), McNeill advocated the formation of a national volunteer force on the lines of the Ulster Volunteer Force. The organisation was established in Dublin on 25 November, its ostensible purpose being to safeguard Home Rule; a number of the executive, however, were members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood who aimed at using the Volunteers to gain full independence,

which indeed came to pass, most of the participants in the 1916 Rising being members of the Volunteers. MacNeill, also a separatist but moderate in tone and well regarded publicly, was given the role of chief of staff.

Under MacNeill's direction recruitment proceeded apace, the numbers eventually reaching 170,000. He also encouraged the creation of a complementary women's force, Cumann na mBan, in April 1914. As chief of staff, he was involved in planning the importation of the Howth arms. Following the split in September 1914 and the defection of the vast majority of members to Redmond, the remaining Irish Volunteers, numbering about 10,000 and mainly located in Dublin, continued under MacNeill's leadership. Many in this new and trimmed-down force of Irish Volunteers had little regard for Home Rule, the majority being committed republicans.

MacNeill's strategy was to organise an insurrection if there were adequate reasons and when circumstances seemed favourable; in the meantime, the Irish Volunteers should be fully armed, trained, and held in readiness to counter any attempt to disarm the organisation, impose conscription, or abandon Home Rule. Some of the IRB faction in the leadership, however, planned an insurrection for the more immediate future. It organised routine manoeuvres for Easter Sunday 1916 as a cover for an insurrection throughout the country. Learning of this on Easter Thursday, MacNeill confronted Patrick Pearse, one of the IRB ringleaders, telling him that he would not allow 'a half-armed force to be called out'. Later, however, Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and Seán MacDiarmada allayed his fears, informing him of the imminent landing of a German ship with substantial quantities of arms at Fenit, Co. Kerry. When it transpired on Saturday evening that the ship had sunk and the arms were lost, MacNeill countermanded the order for manoeuvres the following day.

As a result of MacNeill's countermand, the 1916 Rising was almost entirely confined to Dublin; even there, the numbers were only about a quarter of what they might otherwise have been. The countermand probably did not materially affect the outcome: even the entire Irish Volunteers force, as it then was (10,000 men), could not have withstood the military might which would have been deployed against it. In the event, MacNeill's action probably saved many lives. On the other hand, if it were not for the

countermand, the British might well have prevented the Rising from taking place, thus ensuring that there was no loss of life; once they believed that the manoeuvres were off the British became complacent and in effect allowed the Rising to go ahead.

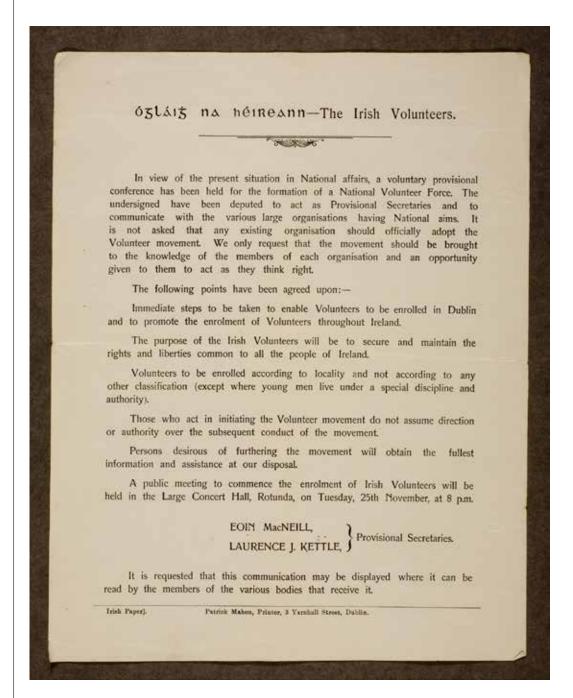
MacNeill took no part in the Rising. Nevertheless, he was tried by courtmartial and sentenced to penal servitude for life; he was released under amnesty in June 1917.



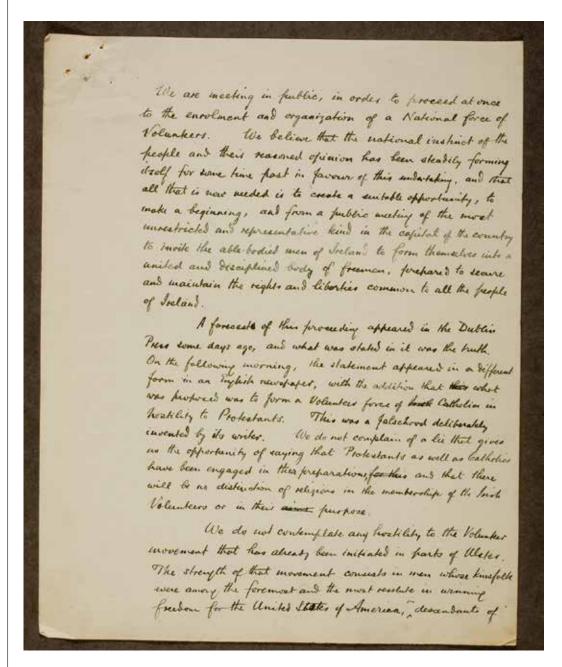
3.2.4 Eoin MacNeill and the Irish Volunteers

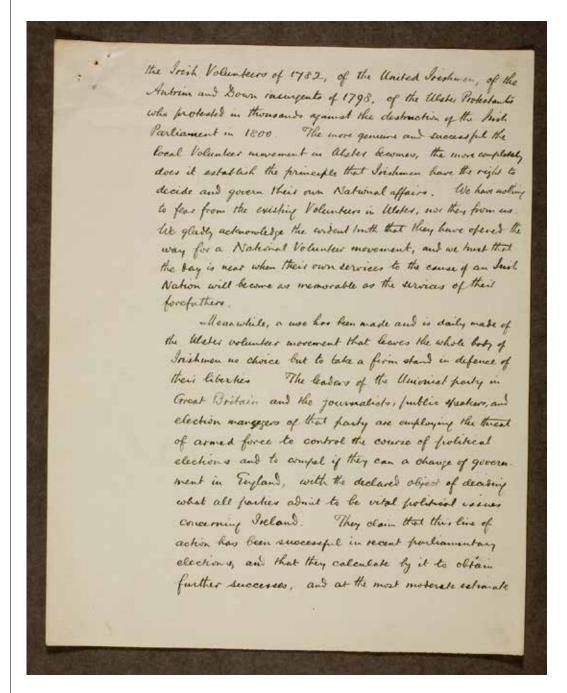


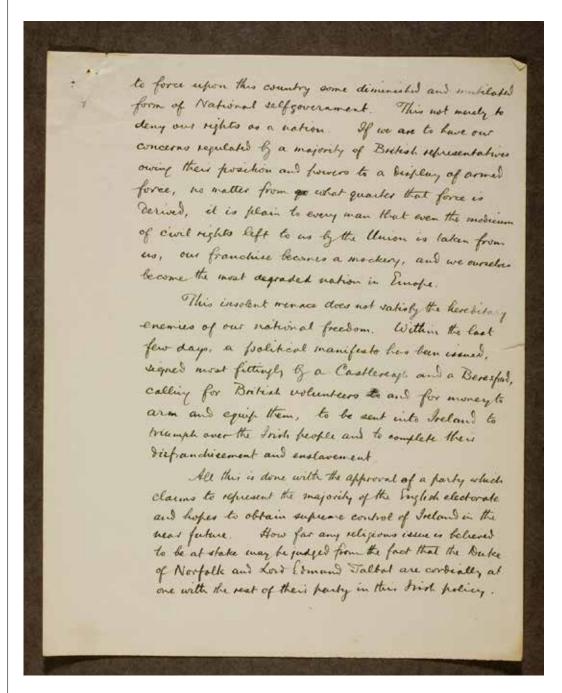
Eoin MacNeill. (Keogh 77)

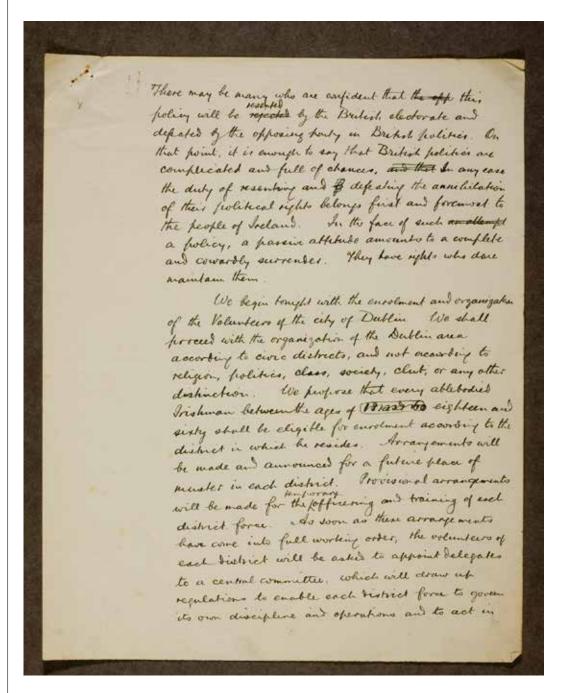


Notice issued by the Irish Volunteers, c.Dec. 1913. (Ms. 8286(2)).



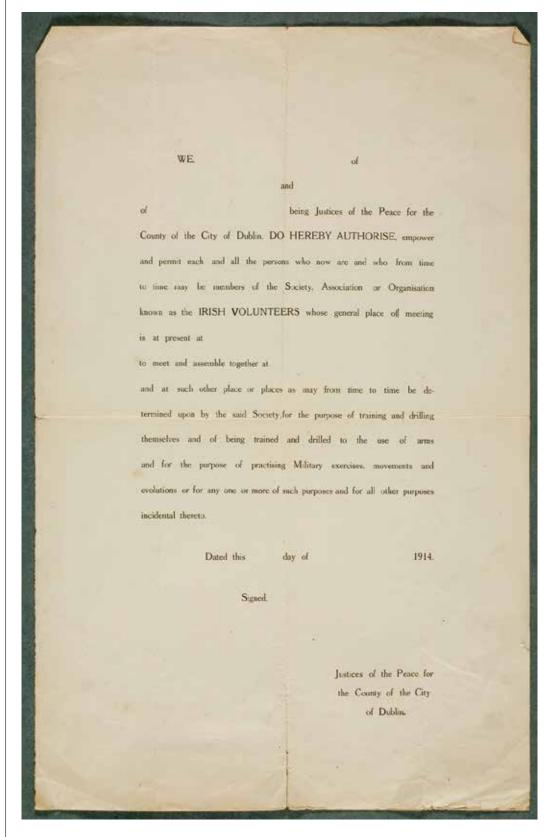




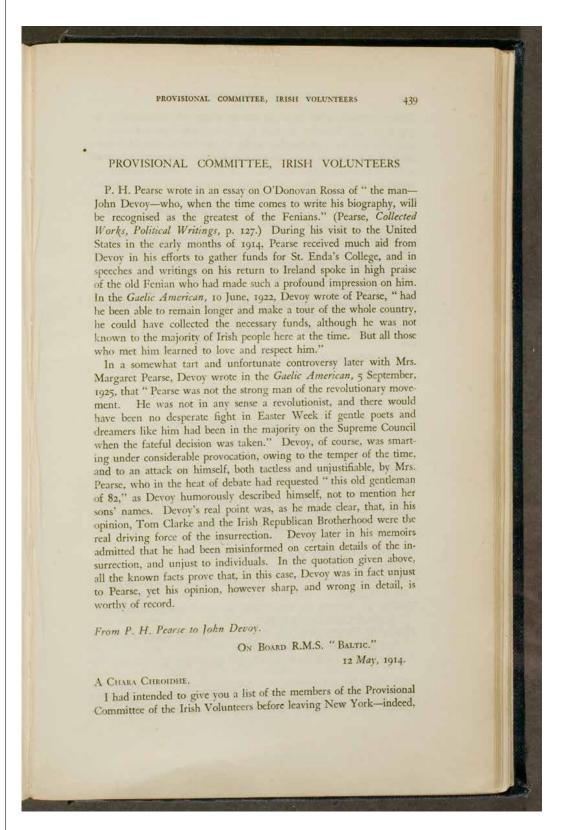




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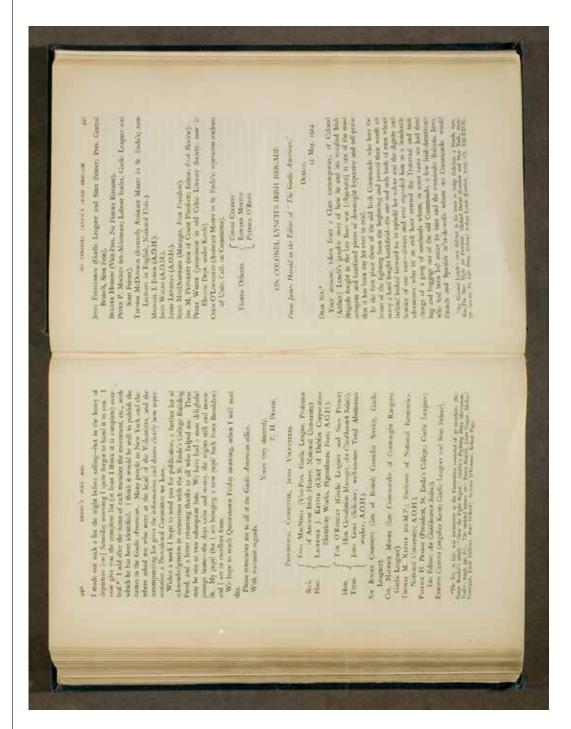
The Irish Volunteers followed the example of the Ulster Volunteers in applying for the permission of magistrates to enable it to carry out drilling. (Proclamations).



Letter from Patrick Pearse to John Devoy listing the members of the provisional committee of the Irish Volunteers; it includes the names of five of the eventual signatories of the Proclamation, 12 May 1914. (Devoy's Post Bag, 1948).



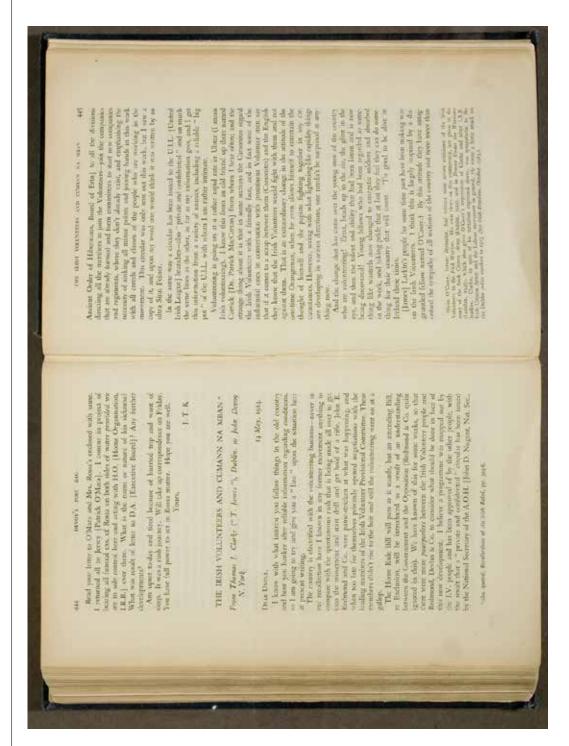
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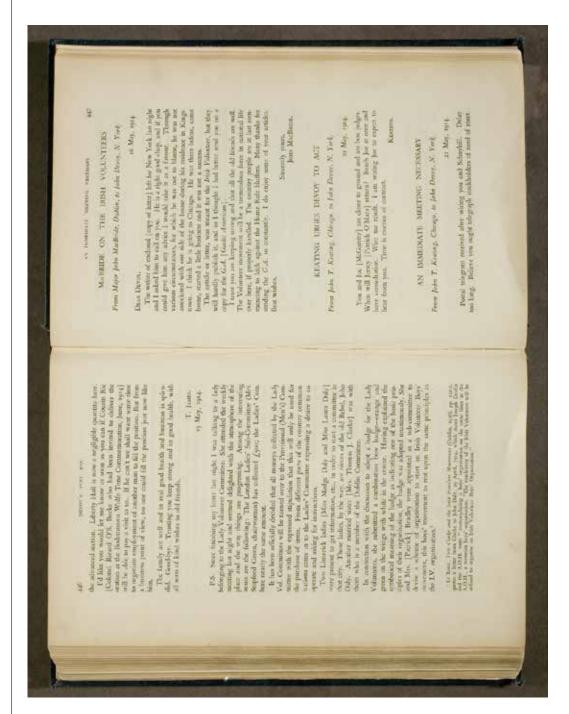
3.2.4 Eoin MacNeill and the Irish Volunteers



Letter from Tom Clarke to John Devoy relating to the Irish Volunteers and to Cumann na mBan, 14 May 1914. (Devoy's Post Bag, 1948).



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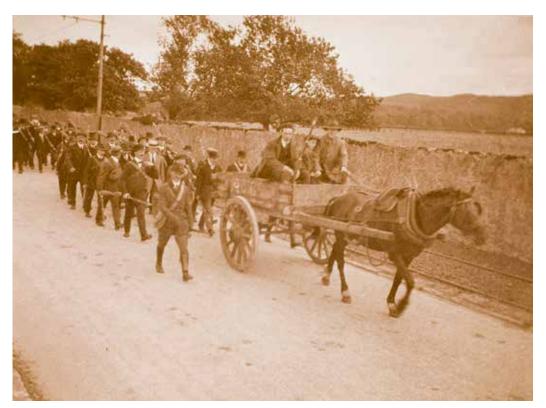




Photographs relating to the importation of arms by the Irish Volunteers at Howth, Co. Dublin, 26 July 1914. The police and military failed to seize the arms. That evening troops opened fire on a hostile crowd on Bachelor's Walk near the centre of Dublin, killing four people and wounding thirty. (Ms. 13,174(7), Hobson Papers).

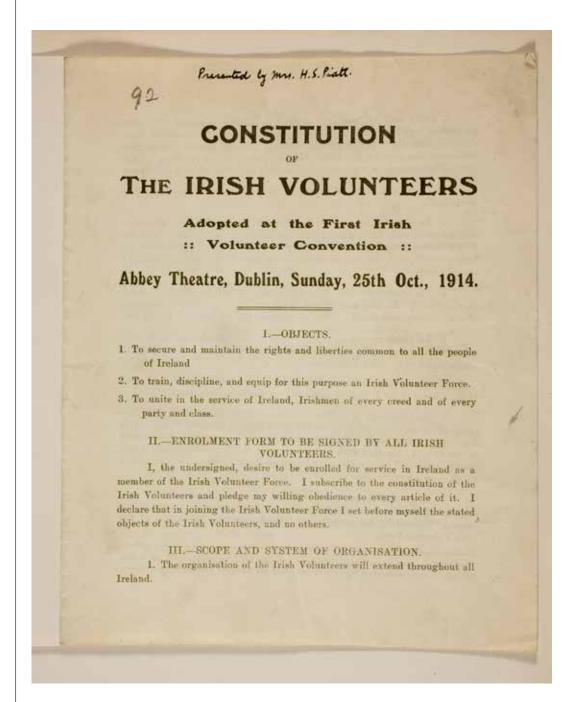


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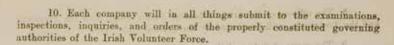


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- 2. Every body of Irishmen, whether in Ireland or abroad, who band themselves together to attain the stated objects, who sign the enrolment form, and who subscribe to the constitution of the Irish Volunteers, will be eligible for recognition as a corps of Irish Volunteers, and may, on payment of Company affiliation fees, be recognised provisionally as a corps of Irish Volunteers.
- 3. A Corps will, upon affiliation, be divided into Companies according
- 4. No second Company will be affiliated or recognised in a district in which there already exists a recognised Company of Irish Volunteers until the first affiliated Company has recruited up to full strength, or permission has been granted by the Governing Body of the Irish Volunteers to establish a second Company.
- 5. The annual affiliation fee, per Company, payable in advance to Headquarters, will be £3. This may be paid in one sum, or in quarterly instalments. When circumstances require it, Half-Companies may be affiliated at half fee*
- 6. No Company will be recognised as permanent until it has been in existence for two months and has fulfilled the requirements of the Military Organisation of the Irish Volunteers.
- 7. The recognised Companies will be formed into battalions according to the scheme of the Military Organisation of the Irish Volunteers.
- 8. The Companies in each county will, until the completion of Military Organisation in each area, be under the jurisdiction of a County Board. This temporary County Board will be formed by Delegates, one from each Company in the County, together with two members of the Irish Volunteers in the county nominated by the General Council of the Irish Volunteers and three co-opted members.
- 9. Apart from the regular payment of fees, in order to ensure the continuance of affiliation, each company must carry on constantly all the military exercises ordered by the properly constituted governing authorities of the Irish Volunteer Force.

^{*}This scale of fees will come into force from the 1st January, 1915, till which date the scale hitherto in force-s payment of one penny per man, per month-will continue.



11. In the Irish-speaking districts, the words of command will be given only in Irish.

IV .- GOVERNMENT OF THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS.

- 1. All power of making, modifying, and amending the Constitution of the Irish Volunteers will reside in the General Convention, which will be held annually, and which will be composed of Delegates, one from each Company, or one from a combination of two Half-Companies of Irish Volunteers, together with all the members of the General Council of the Irish Volunteers.
- 2. A Special Convention will be held at any time on requisition of at least one-third of the affiliated Companies, or by resolution of the General Council.
- 3. The General Council of the Irish Volunteers will consist of sixty-two members (62), namely :- One delegate from each of the thirty-two counties of Ireland (32); one delegate direct from each of the following nine cities-Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, Derry, Waterford, Galway, Sligo, and Kilkenny (9); and the twenty-one members now acting as the Provisional Com-
- 4. This General Council will meet monthly. The General Council may add to its numbers by giving to counties, cities, or to larger areas outside Ireland, the same representation on the General Council as the counties and the nine cities of Ireland.
- 5. The members of the General Council who are to act as Delegates of the Irish Volunteers direct from the counties and cities will be chosen by the Delegates voting county by county, and city by city.
- 6. The President, the Treasurer, and the members resident in or within ten miles of the City of Dublin will be chosen by all the Delegates to the General Council, voting by ballot.
- 7. Those members so elected will form the Central Executive, to meet weekly, or more frequently, and carry on the work of the Organisation.

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- 8. The officers of the Irish Volunteer Force, other than the President and the Treasurers, will be elected by the Central Executive.
- 9. The scope of duties of the Central Executive will be defined by the General Council
- 10. All functions and powers, not herein otherwise expressly assigned, will be held by the General Council, and any of them may be assigned by the General Council to the Central Executive.
- 11. An audited Balance Sheet of Accounts will be submitted to the Annual General Convention by the General Council.



DECLARATION OF POLICY.

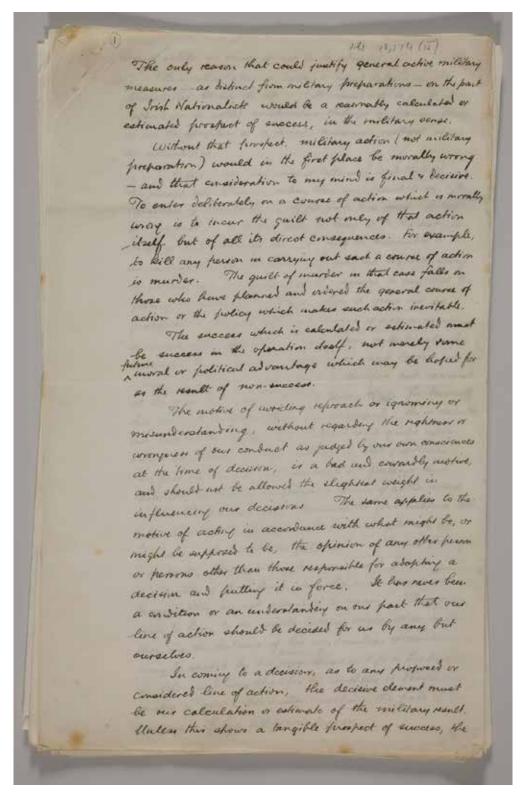
Adopted by the Irish Volunteer Convention, 25th October, 1914.

The following declaration of policy was unanimously adopted by the

- 1. To maintain the right and duty of the Irish Nation henceforward to provide for its own defence by means of a permanent armed and trained Volunteer Force.
- 2. To unite the people of Ireland on the basis of Irish nationality and a common national interest; to maintain the integrity of the nation and to resist with all our strength any measures tending to bring about or perpetuate disunion or the partition of our country.
- 3. To resist any attempt to force the men of Ireland into military service under any Government until a free National Government is empowered by the Irish people themselves to deal with it.
- 4. To secure the abolition of the system of governing Ireland through Dublin Castle and the British military power, and the establishment of a National Government in its place.

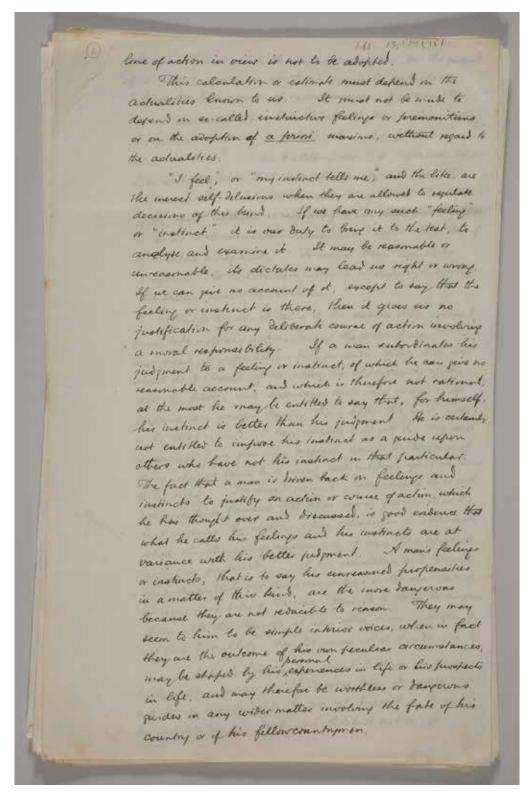


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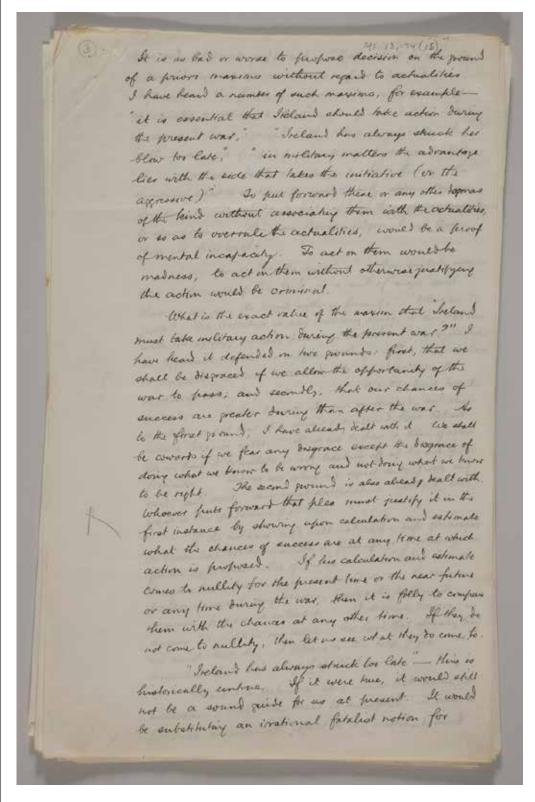


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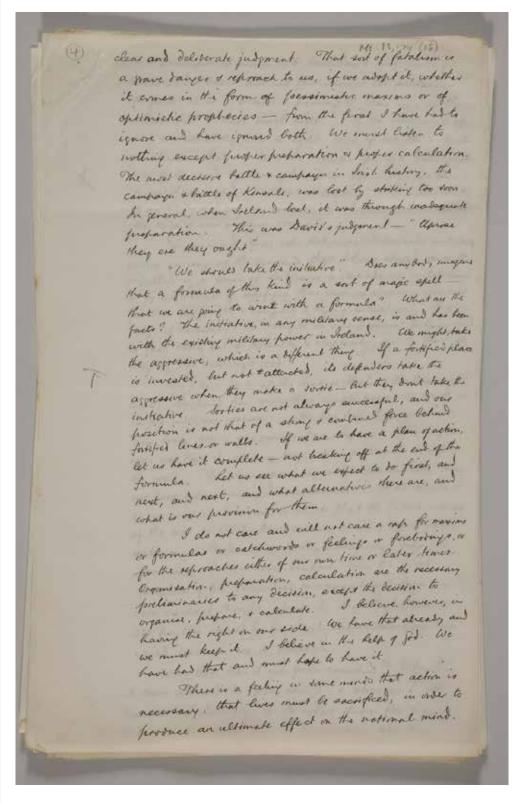


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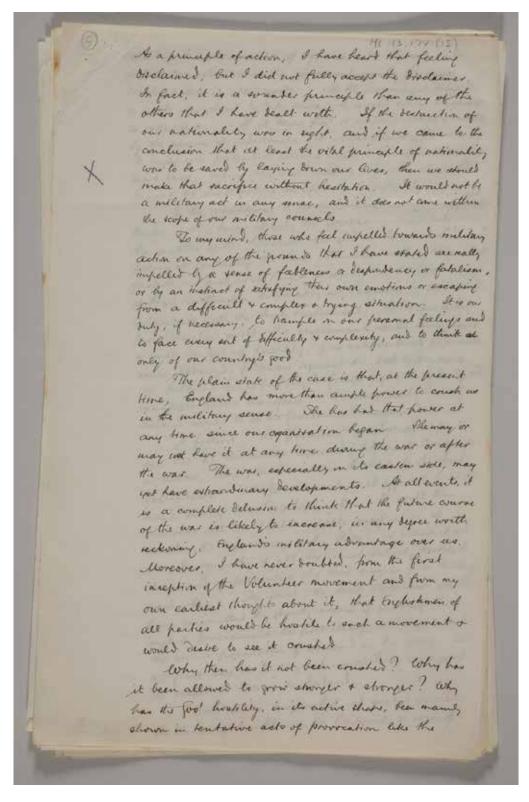


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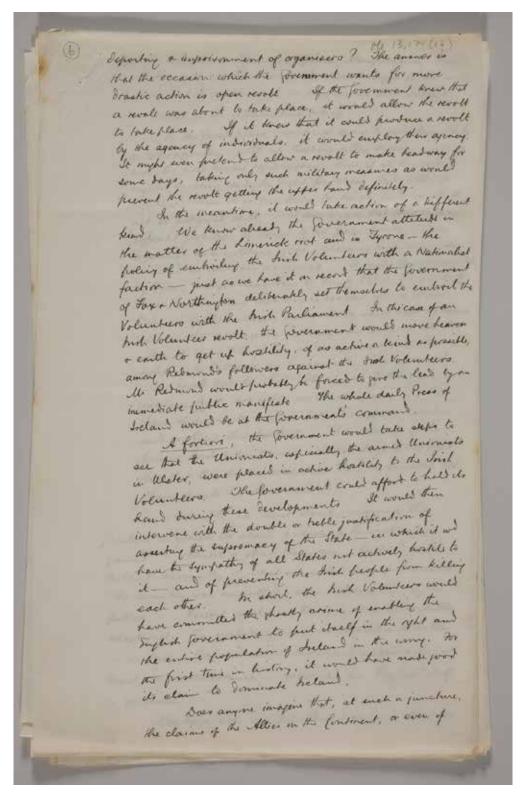


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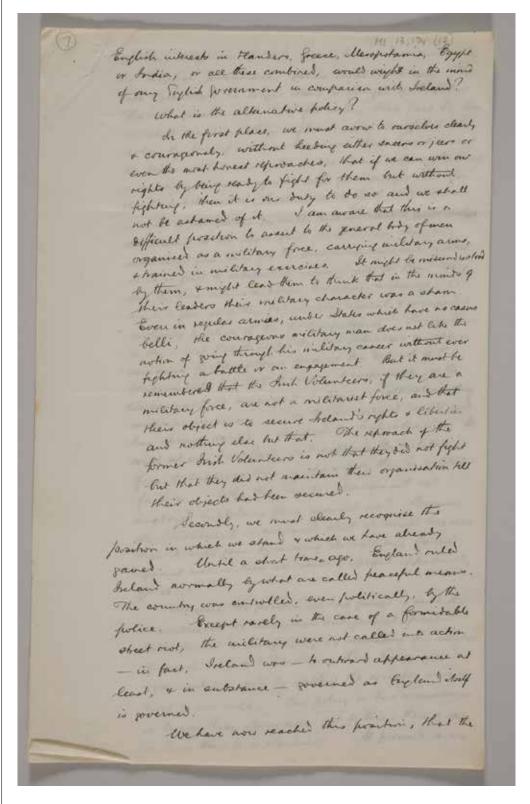


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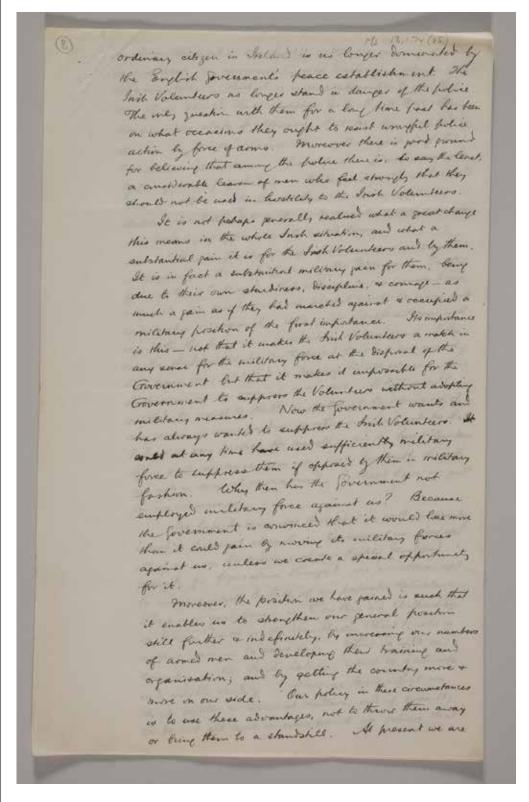


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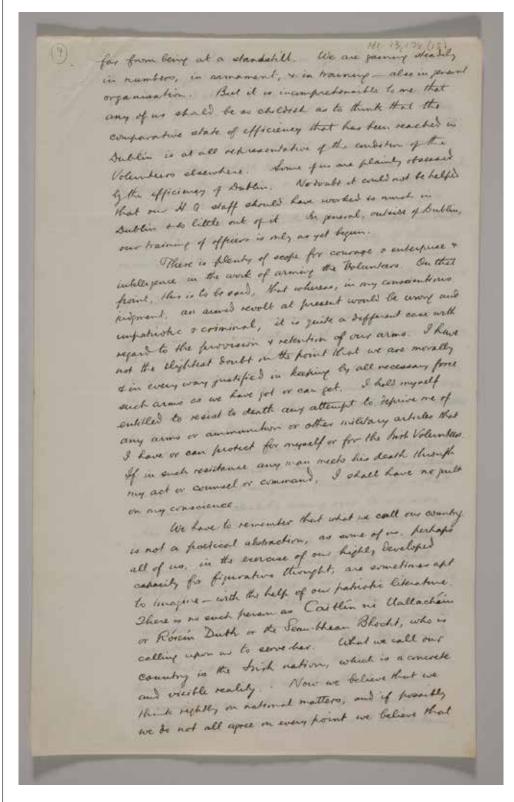


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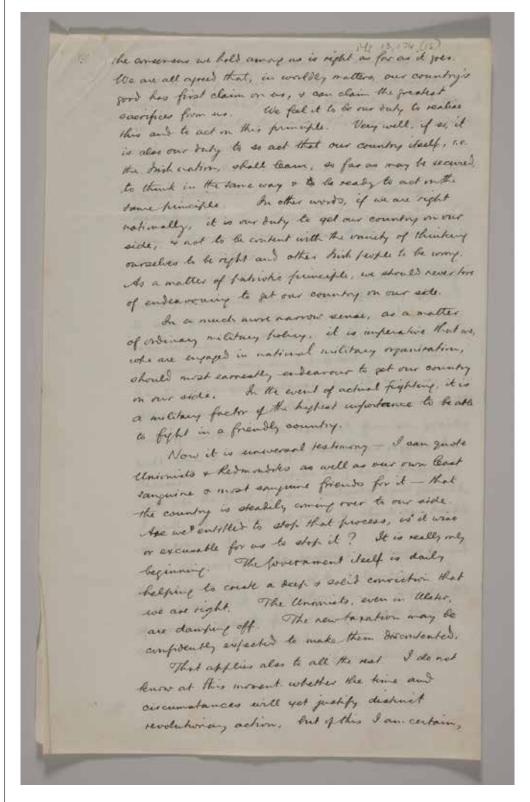


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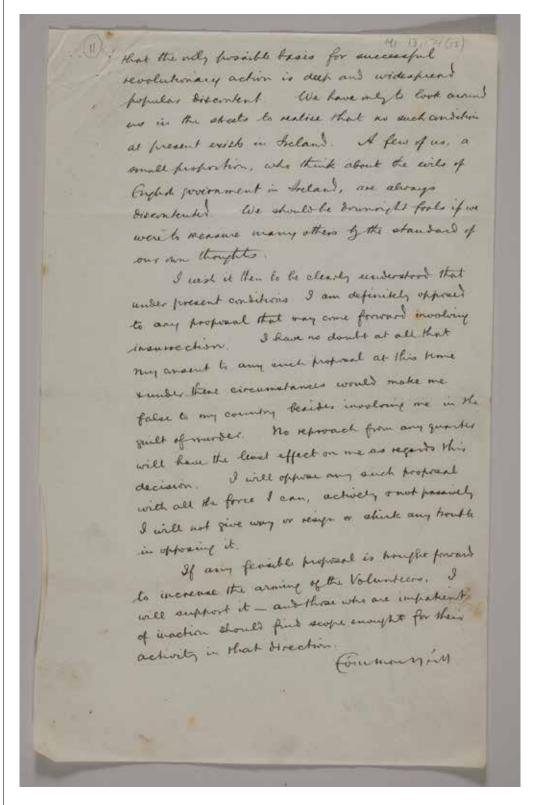


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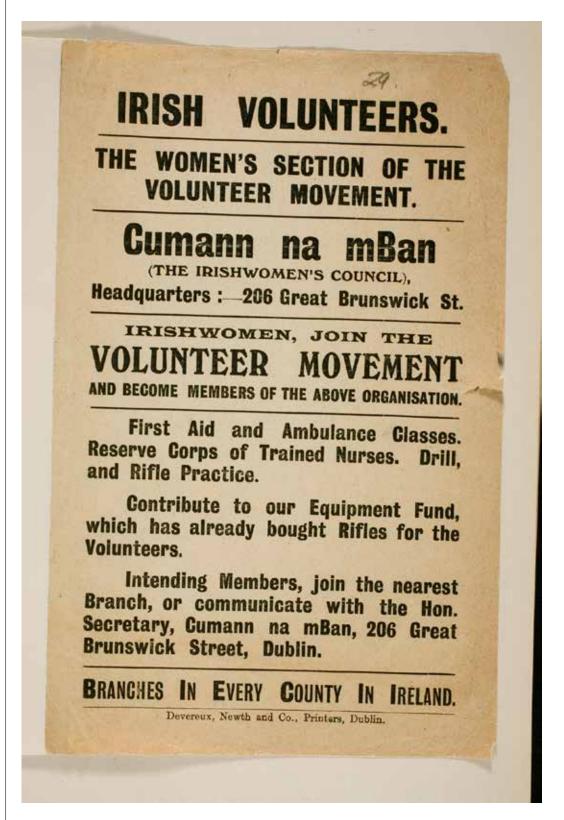




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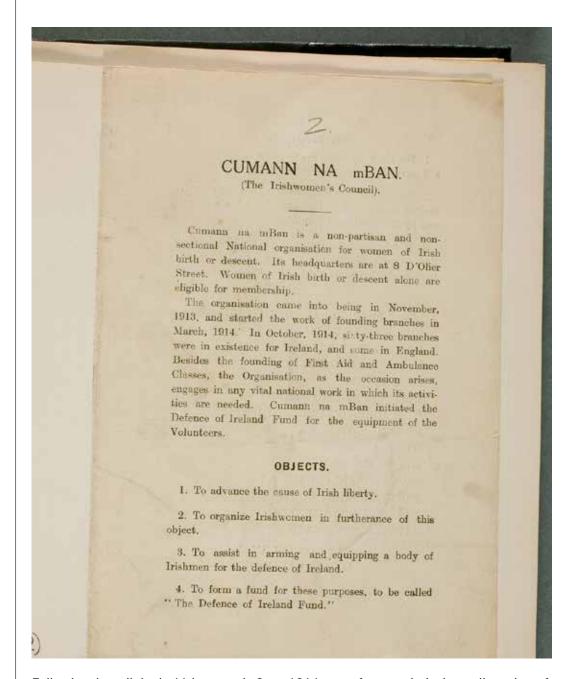
Irish Volunteers parading in Cork City on Saint Patrick's Day, 1916. (Manchester Guardian History of the War, 16 Aug. 1916).



Cumann na mBan was established in April 1914 to complement the Irish Volunteers. Some of its members took part in the 1916 Rising but generally in a non-combatant role.

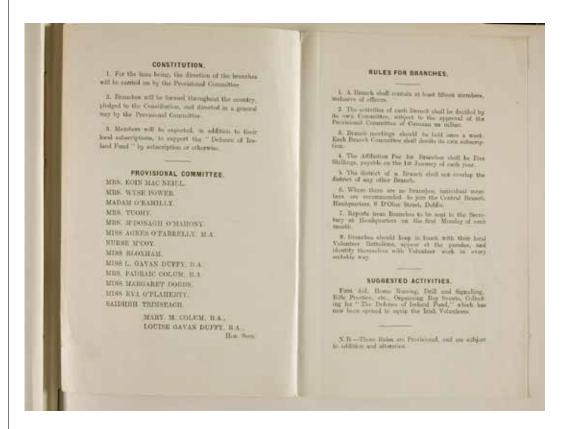


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Following the split in the Volunteers in Sept. 1914, apart from a relatively small number of members Cumann na mBan remained with the Irish Volunteers.

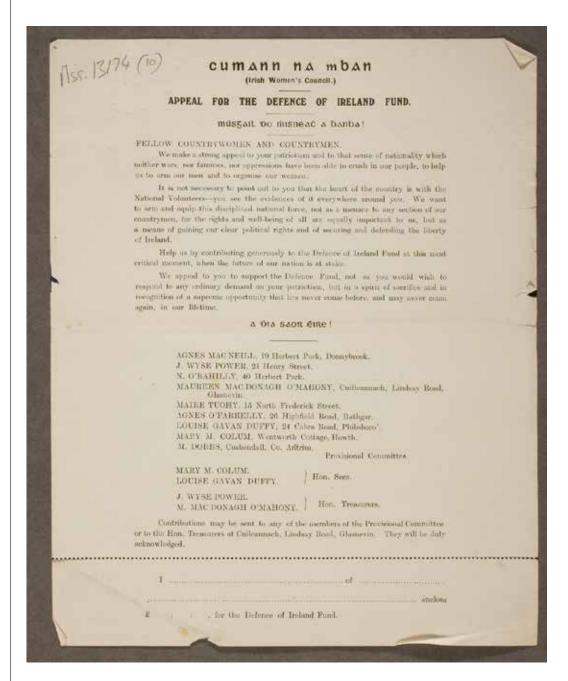




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The Defence of Ireland Fund was intended to finance both the Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan, which mainly administered it. (Ms. 13,174(10), Hobson Papers).